



## NEWS RELEASE

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### Contacts:

Crystal Canney  
(207) 615-5968  
[Ccanney1@une.edu](mailto:Ccanney1@une.edu)

Clay Holtzman  
(207) 662-4239  
[choltzman@mmc.org](mailto:choltzman@mmc.org)

Amy Safford  
(207) 661-6616  
[ASafford@MaineBehavioralHealthcare.org](mailto:ASafford@MaineBehavioralHealthcare.org)

### **UNE, in partnership with Maine Behavioral Healthcare and Maine Medical Center, awarded \$2.2 million federal grant to develop resources for Maine children with autism and developmental disabilities**

The University of New England (UNE), in partnership with Maine Behavioral Healthcare (MBH) and Maine Medical Center (MMC), has been awarded a five-year, \$2.2 million federal grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to create the state's first fully Maine-based Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities (LEND) program. The goal of this initiative is to train healthcare providers, parents, educators and others to improve the health of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (ND).

In Maine, the two greatest areas of need for children with ND are Autism Spectrum Disorder and complex cerebral palsy. Through the LEND program, physicians and affiliated health professionals will be trained in the identification and treatment of children with ASD/ND. In addition, the program will work with schools to provide support for these children and their families.

The Maine LEND program will leverage the clinical, policy and research resources of UNE, MBH and MMC to train professionals in interdisciplinary approaches to assessment, treatment and systems leadership. The curriculum will include didactic and experiential learning, provider conferences, ‘parents as experts’ meetings for family support, research opportunities and innovative fellowships. Trainees will be supervised by expert faculty at three primary clinical training sites — UNE, MBH, and MMC— and have exposure to providers from Maine General’s Edwin Ervin Pediatric Center, the Maine Developmental Disability Council, Maine Area Health Education Center, the Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies at the University of Maine, and Northeast Hearing and Speech, among others. The Maine LEND joins the UNH LEND-affiliated program at the University of Maine in serving children and families across the state.

LEND Project Director Eileen Ricci, P.T., D.P.T., M.S., PCS, associate clinical professor in UNE’s College of Health Professions, said, “With this new partnership between UNE, Maine Behavioral Healthcare and Maine Medical Center, Maine joins 37 other states in providing LEND programs that bring holistic attention to the needs of children with autism spectrum disorder and other neurodevelopmental disabilities.” By training comprehensive teams of professionals, she said, “the Maine LEND program will be instrumental in improving the quality of life for these children and their families. This grant positions UNE to be a leader in preparing specialists to promote best practice integration of children with neurodevelopmental disorders into the school system and the workplace, and to effectively diagnose and treat these children.”

LEND Co-Project Director Matthew Siegel, M.D., associate professor of Psychiatry and Pediatrics at Tufts University and Director of Developmental Disorders at Maine Behavioral Healthcare remarked, “This is a major opportunity for Maine graduate students and early career professionals to receive top-notch training in meeting the needs of children with autism and other neurodevelopmental disabilities. We will draw on our nationally-recognized models of interdisciplinary care in our specialized inpatient, day treatment and outpatient settings to provide unique training experiences to the LEND trainees.”

“Maine Medical Center looks forward to this collaboration that will provide a medical home in Maine for children with cerebral palsy,” said Alexa Craig, M.D., of Maine Medical Partners - Pediatric Neurology, a department of MMC. “This is a tremendous opportunity for us to teach LEND trainees how to provide the highest quality of care for these children and their families.”

Maine Behavioral Healthcare (MBH) is a nonprofit organization serving more than 20,000 children and adults at multiple locations throughout southern, western, and mid-coast Maine, providing a continuum of coordinated mental healthcare. The [Developmental Disorders Program](#) at MBH is the only program in Maine where children with a developmental disorder, such as autism or intellectual disability, can access a continuum of intensive treatment from acute hospitalization to day treatment and outpatient care for behavioral and mental health challenges. Learn more at [www.mainebehavioralhealthcare.org](http://www.mainebehavioralhealthcare.org).

Maine Medical Center (MMC), recognized as the number-one ranked hospital in Maine by U.S. News and World Report for 2015-2016, is a complete health care resource for the people of Greater Portland and the entire state, as well as northern New England. Incorporated in 1864, MMC is the state’s largest medical center, licensed for 637 beds and employing nearly 6,500 people. MMC’s unique role as both a community hospital and a referral center requires an unparalleled depth and breadth of services, including an active educational program and a world-class biomedical research

center. As a nonprofit institution, Maine Medical Center provides nearly 23 percent of all the charity care delivered in Maine. MMC is a member of the MaineHealth system, a growing family of health care services in northern New England. For more information, visit [www.mmc.org](http://www.mmc.org).

The University of New England is Maine's largest private university, an innovative educational community with two distinctive coastal Maine campuses, a vibrant new campus in Tangier, Morocco, and a robust offering of degree and certificate programs online. UNE is home to Maine's only medical and dental schools—part of a comprehensive health education mission built on a pioneering interprofessional approach that includes pharmacy, nursing and an array of allied health professions.

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